

CHAPTER V.

PROGRESS OF THE REFORMATION IN GERMANY, AND ITS RESULTS.

LUTHER and his fellow-theologians had thus unreservedly thrown in their lot with the antagonists and conquerors of the peasants. They had fairly earned the goodwill and patronage of an Elector of Saxony, a Landgrave of Hesse, though at the cost of incurring the hatred of the people. It was a heavy price to pay for princely protection, especially from the ethical standpoint. It was unfortunate, to say the least, that the reforming theologians did not take up a more independent and a more Christian attitude towards a movement which, from the practical point of view, was as religious a movement as that which took its rise from the monk's cell at Erfurt. If true religion consists in the love of man as well as the love of God, it was incumbent on the religious teachers of the age to insist on reforms which had for their object the social as well as the spiritual welfare of the masses. Luther had indeed counselled the princes and nobles to deal justly with the common man. He even warned them of the consequences of unjust oppression. But when it came to the point he allowed panic and prejudice to carry him away into the fiercest partisanship on the side of repression, and indulged in the most heartless gibes at the beaten democracy's expense. In this respect the Reformation under his auspices missed its grandest opportunity—the opportunity of allying religion with social progress, and thus making the Reformation a social force as well as a doctrinal movement. It became merely an aristocratic, a middle-class movement. There was far too much stress laid by the reformers on sound doctrine, far too little on primitive Christianity. Social amelioration in Germany was consequently, as far as the Lutheran Reformation was concerned, an abortion,